

West Point graduates ready to face the future

By Irene Brown
Editor, "Pointer View"

The U.S. Military Academy's Class of 2005 has been dubbed the "Class of 9-11" by many because they came in just before the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001. Saturday, the class lived up to its name as 911 West Point cadets gathered at Michie Stadium here for the annual graduation exercise.

Under clear, blue skies and the loving and watchful eyes of family and friends, the next leaders of the nation listened to graduation speaker, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Richard B. Myers, talk about what they would face in the near future.

"Your future will be full of challenges and unexpected obstacles," he said. "Much will be asked of you in the coming years."

So far, roughly 23 West Point graduates have lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan and countless others are currently commanding troops or taking part in rebuilding efforts. Members of the Class of 2005 heard from many of them during a recent senior leaders' conference.

Last month, 65 officer mentors from the rank of first lieutenant to lieutenant general spent two days at the academy. They offered their expertise and insight as experienced battle commanders to stress to cadets what it's like being a professional military officer during war.

"I would have given anything to sit down and ask questions of former platoon leaders, company commanders and battalion commanders in this environment," said Col. Joe Sartiano, a 1984 West Point graduate. "That's the one thing we lacked 20 years ago when I was a cadet, our professional development in this forum."

Myers stressed to the graduates that their country will expect them to continue being leaders in the field.

"This is your time to lead and I know you're ready," he said. "Take care of America's sons and daughters in your charge; they are America's newest 'greatest generation.'"

The general told the graduates they will be expected to live up to their class motto, "Keeping Freedom Alive."

"We are a nation at war and preservation of our way of life is at stake," Myers said.

He told them their decision to remain at West Point sets the standard for selfless service.

"You saw the vicious attack on Sept. 11 and watched our country go to war," he said. "Yet you raised your hands and decided to stay and serve."

"Now you will join a Long, Gray Line of those who have gone before you and shaped our nation's history," Myers continued. "I thank and commend you for your decision to serve."